Attitudes toward Language Variation: Evidence from a Qualitative Study of Sociolinguistic Interviews

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Speech perception is the series of cognitive processes that aid us in interpreting and decoding speech sounds into meaningful information. We rely on this ability to communicate through spoken language with others. Early research into the mechanisms of speech perception focused largely on the listener's perception of isolated, purportedly asocial acoustic cues. However, contemporary research increasingly recognizes that speech perception is multimodal; we rely on much more than auditory processing while parsing speech in everyday life, as we usually have the advantage of being able to see as well as hear the speaker. The advantage of having visual information while listening to speech is known as the audio-visual benefit (AV benefit; Babel and Russell, 2015; Massaro, 1998; McGurk & MacDonald, 1976). An example of an AV benefit is when speech is more intelligible to a listener who can see her interlocutor. Speech perception is also social, and social information gleaned from hearing and seeing a conversational partner can influence speech perception as well (Porter et al., 2015). This paper examines the sociolinguistic attitudes and beliefs of 46 participants in interviews conducted as part of the "Race, Ethnicity, and Speech Intelligibility in Normal Hearing and Hearing Impairment" project. Future analysis of these interviews may reveal how these participants' attitudes toward language variation and social identity may affect the AV benefit their speech elicits from future listeners.

The "Race, Ethnicity, and Speech Intelligibility in Normal Hearing and Hearing Impairment" project (henceforth the REI study) is a research project currently being conducted by Dr. Benjamin Munson and Dr. Alayo Tripp in the Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences department. It is motivated by previous studies which demonstrate a more complex relationship between visual information, social information and speech perception. Perceived social attributes of speakers, such as race, gender, and age, can affect listeners' judgements on their speech intelligibility (Dragojevic et al. 2018; Niedzielski, 1999; Babel et al., 2014), which can potentially decrease the AV benefit: in a 2009 study, Kang and Rubin found that undergraduates remembered less information about an audio recording of a lecture when it was paired with an Asian individual's face than when it was paired with that of a white person. This experiment is being re-tested on a larger scale using this online database. As part of the first phase of this study, we have created a database of speech obtained from a group of racially diverse speakers. In the second phase, perception experiments will be conducted to observe how the race and ethnicity of these speakers might influence the AV benefit they elicit. Different groups of listeners will be examined as well, including younger and older people with and without hearing impairments. The interviews being explored in this paper were optional and given to participants who contributed to the REI database after their final recording session. Responses these participants gave in their sociolinguistic interviews suggested that a large number of them viewed a stereotypical English speaker as a white, highly educated, accentless speaker of American or British English, and (with

few exceptions) did not view their authentic speech patterns as aligning with those of this stereotypical speaker due to a broad range of regional, cultural and linguistic differences.

The interviews of 46 participants in the REI study were analysed. Participants were recruited through postings on social media and other online venues. All were between the ages of 18 to 40 and native speakers of English, defined as having learned English from birth from at least one parent who spoke English consistently in the home. 34 Female, 11 male, and 1 gender unspecified participants were recruited. Of these participants, the racial breakdown was the following:

No. Participants	Racial category
17	White
9	Black
10	Asian
4	Race unspecified
6	More than one race

Full participant demographics are shown in Appendix 1.

A qualitative analysis was conducted through informal interviews where participants were asked a series of questions about the speech patterns of themselves and their friends and family in contrast to those of a stereotypical English speaker, as well as any follow-up questions elicited by participants' responses:

1. "If I told you that someone was a stereotypical English speaker, what would you expect them to look and sound like?"
2. "When and where do you think your speech is most authentic, and how is your speech different from a stereotypical speaker?"
3. "What about your friends and family? Do they sound like stereotypical speakers of English? Why or why not?"

These questions were designed to elicit responses which would allow investigators to characterize differences in a participant's sociolinguistic practices and linguistic attitudes, particularly how these practices differ when speaking with people with whom they are close. This level of detail would not be apparent from the other questionnaires the participants were asked to complete, which collected their demographic information and histories of their

experience with named language varieties. The first question elicits broad judgements regarding participants' social representations of English speakers. The second question asks participants to broadly reflect on how they associated variation in their own speech with the expression of authenticity. Rather than ask directly about how participants associated speech variation with very specific social judgements this question instead invited participants to reflect on any number of social judgments in answering (e.g. formality, familiarity, setting, identity), while also providing some insight into how participants may perceive the impact of the controlled recording setting on their speech quality. The final question, which asks participants to reflect on the speech variation observable in people they are socially close with, was designed to further reveal sociolinguistic attitudes, as well as potentially meaningful variation in their current, rather than historical linguistic environments.

All interviews were video recorded through Zoom and manually transcribed. After transcription, the interviews were annotated and codes were developed to identify recurring themes in participant narratives. Quotes from participants have been slightly edited for clarity. We present each of the three questions individually, followed by analysis of the specific themes found in participant responses.

Q.1: "If I told you that someone was a stereotypical English speaker, what would you expect them to look and sound like?"

The first question utilised the broad notion of 'stereotypicality' to allow participants to define what linguistic profile they associated with the phrase "English speaker." This question also acted as a gauge of how close to the 'stereotypical English speaker' the respondents viewed themselves.

White American or British

For most Americans, the sound and accompanying image of a stereotypical English speaker is that of a white person, typically one from the suburbs or who has attained higher education, who speaks with a Western or Midland American accent, which is largely seen as lacking a distinct regional quality to it (Bonfiglio, 2002). This is commonly (and vaguely) referred to as General or Standard American English. Similarly in the United Kingdom, 'Received Pronunciation' is considered a general British English accent not associated with any specific region in the United Kingdom. Variations from these dialects (e.g. Southern American English) are seen as inferior to the dominant standard English used predominantly by white, affluent members of society. Participants' idea of an ideal English speaker was overwhelmingly in accordance with this norm. Many interviewed explicitly identified a stereotypical English speaker as a white person from

America or England who spoke in this ‘standard’ dialect. A few participants identified a Canadian as a stereotypical speaker instead.

> “ I would expect them to look... I guess a white American… I would expect them to be white, um I guess the skin white, probably mostly blonde I would say. And then sounding, I would say the U.S. accent specifically.” (48, White Female)

> “Oh, I expect them to be white, possibly blonde, blue eyes [laughs]. Yeah… [and] Sound like just American [laughs] is the best way to put it, yeah.” (11, Asian Female)

> “Um, I would expect them to be white and British and have an English accent.” (28, Black Female)

Some participants gave their hypothetical speaker specific physical attributes to suggest whiteness, such as ‘blonde hair’ ‘blue/green eyes’, and ‘fair skin’. No participant specified a nonwhite race. A few participants did acknowledge that there is a large international community of English speakers and that this idea of a general American speaker was not the reality for much of the world.

> “Oh, okay. Um I guess if I had to, stereotypical English speaker, I would think of, uh, somebody that’s Caucasian. Even though it’s [an] international language… I’m sorry, this is kind of difficult, I'm overthinking it. ‘Cause it’s like, on the one hand, [when] you’d think stereotypical English speaker you’d think somebody from America or Britain. But a lot of other countries speak English from birth. I mean, I’m German myself, so I know that in Germany they already start kindergarten with English so they learn it pretty much as a native language… a stereotypical English speaker could actually come in a lot of different forms, whether that be somebody from America or another country, I think there’s a lot of people that could be considered like a stereotypical English speaker.” (10, White Female)

> “I think I wouldn’t have any expectations of what they would look and sound like, because there are so many people that speak English so I can’t just say what they look and sound like.” (26, Female, More than one race)

> “Somebody that looks like me, just a regular person, nothing extra, just looks casual just like I do.” (29, Black Male)

Region

As mentioned previously, General or Standard American English is typically considered to be a regionless accent, but it can be more accurately described as an amalgamation of accents from across the United States whose features most closely mimic Midwestern and Midland American accents (van Riper, 2014). This neutral American accent has replaced the dramatic Mid-Atlantic

accent that many upper class Americans and American entertainers used as a sign of prestige and intelligence, and General American English is commonly used today by news anchors. Many participants specifically referenced this television style accent in their responses:

> "...I think that I would expect them to have kind of a geography-less accent, um, so maybe like who's on the news. Um, but not local news, CBS or NPR Marketplace or something." (23, Asian Female)

> "My sister actually, uh, trained to do radio in high school so she changed the way she says certain words… So um I think that's kind of a hyper awareness I have of language, knowing—like kind of seeing those two extremes, of, of a sort of rehearsed and practiced way of speaking, versus, y'know sort of a country, Southern-ish, um, way of speaking." (31, Female, Chose not to specify race. Q3)

A variety of regions in the United States were suggested, but the stereotypical speaker was mostly placed in the Midwestern region of the United States.

> "I'd probably expect someone who has more fair skin. Um, who probably speaks, uh, not with like any certain type of dialect, so not with a really strong Long Island accent, or Jersey accent, or Texas accent. I'd probably think of kind of like, the most basic English voice." (14, White Female)

> "Uh, stereotypically I'd probably expect someone to be white. Uh, probably Midwestern, like from the Chicago area or somewhere in the Midwest." (22, White Male)

> "[laughs] Um, if I was told someone was a stereotypical English speaker, I would think someone that was white and from the Northeast. A Mid-Atlantic accent." (35, Asian Female)

> "They-they're a white person, and um… I'm from the south, so they would not have a southern accent. They'd have a, I guess what people would call a Midwestern accent, but it wouldn't be Minnesotan. [laughs]" (21, Asian Female)

Accents and Professionalism

Lippi-Green defines an 'accent' as "a loosely defined reference to sets of distinctive differences over geographic or social space, most usually phonological and intonation features. In the case of second language learning, accent may refer to the carryover of native language phonology and intonation into a target language" (1994, p. 165). Lippi-Green attributes much of our institutional and personal biases against accent speech to adherence to a 'standard language ideology' imposed by the dominant culture that does not recognize that "for spoken language, variation is systematic, structured, and inherent, and that the national standard is an abstraction" (p. 170). Most people believe the dialect with the highest social prestige is also the only correct and valid

form of the language, when in fact, no dialects and accents are linguistically valid. Many participants specified that a stereotypical English speaker would speak clearly, professionally, and in grammatically correct and unaccented English.

> "They would sound articulate, and with no accent from any specific geographical region." (19, White Male)

> "How would they sound? Quote unquote professional, I guess." (38, Black Female)

> "Um, the first thing that comes to mind is like a white male, formally dressed, sounding very proper and clear." (25, Male, More than one race)

> ""Um, I guess white is what I'd expect them to look like. [laughs] and I guess I'd expect them to "sound proper" [finger quotes], if that's a term." (37, Female, More than one race)

> "I guess I would expect them to be like white and just sound like no accent from anywhere… when I say no accent, I'm imagining my parents' accent, and I imagine it gone, so I just imagine like, like my professor who is white talking. I don't know how to describe it." (51, Asian Female)

Speech quality

Outside of accented speech, other characteristics of speech were given by participants as integral to a stereotypical English speaker. Many of these characteristics were in line with the idea of a stereotypical speaker as highly educated: speaking without slang or grammatical and phonetic errors, along with a General American speech prosody.

> "I would expect them to sound like… I would expect their English to be fluent, so I'd expect them to sound fluent..." (16, Black Male)

> "[They would] sound with correct pronunciation the English vowels and consonants, but most importantly the vowels." (47, Female, Chose not to specify race)

> "I think I would expect them to be white, I would expect that they have… that they like pronounce their consonants quite well, um, and that they have kind of a mastery of like, pronouns and what pronouns they intend on using. Um, that they understand where a conjunction goes in a sentence, that they have sort of a basic, uh, grammatical pattern that would be very readable if you wrote it out or if you transcribed the thing that they were saying." (23, Asian Female)

Other attributes

Gender

Only a few participants specified whether a stereotypical English speaker would be male or female; the majority of participants used gender neutral language while discussing this hypothetical speaker. However, in situations where a participant did, they usually specified that the speaker would be male. This male was nearly always given attributes associated with being of a dominant social group, or with social prestige (e.g., being white, older in age, reminiscent of a university professor, speaking 'properly', etc). One participant in particular noted that a stereotypical speaker of English would likely appear or sound cisgender:

> "Um, well I think my first thought is like 'the Queen's English' [finger quotes], so like an old-timey British gentleman. So yeah, like a cis white dude like in a suit from like a hundred years ago." (39, Chose not to specify gender, Chose not to specify race)

As with much other social information, gender identity and sexuality can also be inferred through speech. There is a growing body of literature on how sociolinguistic variation in gender and sexuality is realized and received through spoken language (see: Munson & Babel, 2019 for a review). Research continues to be done in this area, but identifying phonetic parameters for gender identity is still a rather difficult task due to its culturally contextual nature and the relative newness of this line of inquiry (Munson 2011). However, this participant identified as nonbinary and one can speculate that the social pressures associated with non-cis identity may engender different sensitivity to gender identity, so where a cisgender participant may not have thought to note cis/trans distinctions it was a distinction worth highlighting to this non-binary participant when discussing ideas of what it means to be a stereotypical English speaker.

Personality

Much of linguistic variation is structured around social identity, for both speakers and listeners. For decades research has shown how listeners can attribute a variety of personal traits to a speaker, from physical attractiveness, social status, intelligence, and even criminality, solely based on how they sound (Giles & Powesland, 1975). Most participants did not delve into the character attributes of their stereotypical English speaker, or did so with mainly positive characteristics (e.g., proper, well-educated), but one participant had a different perspective:

> 45: Stereotypical… probably just kind of snobby. A snobby kind of person, snooty, nose up, kind of think they know everything. That's what that sounds like to me.
>
> DR. TRIPP: And what would they look like?

> 45: What would they look like? Uh, I see glasses, like, like, prescriptive kind of like glasses, kind of a, y'know, designer clothes and y'know an evil, and evil expression on their face, kind of, that's the picture that I see for that. (45, Black Female)

Q.2: When and where do you think your speech is most authentic? How is your speech different from a stereotypical speaker?

The second question utilised the broad notion of 'authenticity' to allow participants to define what settings they felt most comfortable speaking in and how this comfortable speech may differ from speech used in formal or unfamiliar settings. This question also acted as a gauge of how close to the previously established 'stereotypical English speaker' the respondents viewed themselves.

Speech authenticity

Authenticity is associated with strong affective ties

Nearly all participants identified their speech as most authentic "when comfortable," which typically fell into the context of being around family and friends or peers; many explicitly contrasted "comfort" with formal, academic or non-domestic settings. Many also attributed this comfort to being part of the same racial/ethnic groups as family and friends, or being from the same region:

> "I think my English is most authentic when I'm just having casual conversations with friends or family or my dating partner." (26, Female, More than one race)

> "Uh, I feel like it's most authentic in an informal context, so like with friends, family, not um like, not in like a professional setting or a setting where it's like I can be potentially judged based on what I'm saying." (42, Asian Female)

> "Um… I would say it sounds the most authentic when I'm around other Korean-Americans. Otherwise, Koreans say I sound very American, and American, American, my American friends say I sound very Korean [laughs], so." (11, Asian Female)

> "Oh, I feel here in California my speech is most authentic." (40, Female, Chose not to specify race)

As discussed previously, much of linguistic variation is structured around social identity and dependent on geographical location. Standard English is associated with the educational,

commercial and administrative spheres, but in daily life, many people deviate from this standard and may not feel their speech is authentic while using it.

Code switching

Code switching was not overtly mentioned in the question yet many participants made reference to it, particularly first generation American participants or participants from bilingual communities:

> "Um, I think sometimes I have like a Latin flare to it, sometimes when I'm speaking. Especially if I've gone a long period of time speaking Spanish and then I come back to English. Especially when I'm with my friends who speak English but we're all Hispanic..." (48, White Female)

> "It's most authentic when I'm around people like me, who understand both Spanish and English… there are some words that have been developed into Spanglish, so [there are] some words where only people who know Spanish will understand what I'm talking about. " (47, Female, Chose not to specify race)

African-American participants also made reference to code switching, and there was discussion of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE):

> "My speech is most authentic when I'm around family and people that look like me. Um, so my speech is different in terms of that I might use more African-American Vernacular English than I would in a different setting. (43, Black Male)

> "I have a lot of thoughts about this. Um, for a long time, I tried to fit my speech to the scenarios I was in, my schools were very, very predominately white. Obviously, my family is not. Um, and so I would sort of bounce back and forth. But eventually sometime in my twenties I stopped trying to do that because it was too tiring… these days I find my most authentic speech is actually when I am speaking about my studies, because they're my interests…" (09, Black Male)

Speech is most authentic within a specific speech community or setting

Participant 9 was not alone in finding his speech most authentic when discussing his personal interests. A handful of participants associated their authentic speech with being around people with shared interests, and being free to use certain vernacular as a result of this:

> "I guess [my speech is most authentic] with scholars my age who nerd out on language… We have a Scholars of Color group for language—folks in language studies, and, um, since then I've just—it's like my little home [laughs] and then once we get together and chat it's like we kind of realize, Oh, like, oh—we have words." (02, Asian Female)

> "With close friends they understand, like certain phrases I use, so I feel like that's like more of like the big difference I guess, it's just like joking terms and stuff that we use that I like don't say around other people." (33, Black Female)

Speech communities such as these are common. Speakers often use language to construct social identities and signal membership in certain groups through speech (Yule, 2020). Speech authenticity was also connected to emotional state by a few participants:

> "I think it's most authentic when I am calm… probably talking with my partner. Um, when I'm not worried… 'cause like you said at the beginning of this, uh, when I was trying to communicate clearly I was over-enunciating a little bit…" (20, White Male)

> "I think when I am very angry. Um, and when I'm… I guess, the theme is under some sort of influence, whether that's heightened emotions, like when I'm with friends and we're happy, or a little bit drunk, or like, super mad." (05, White Female)

Always authentic

Finally, a handful of participants felt that their speech was always authentic.

> "I'd say my speech is most authentic… I don't know, I'd say pretty much all the time, I pretty much speak what I feel…" (10, White Male)

> "I don't think there's any difference from my casual speech and, and a stereotypical speaker." (16, Black Male)

> "Um, my speech is authentic all the time, I don't know any other time to not be authentic. And what would make it different is that, you know, I don't y'know, I don't try y'know I don't try to change up, I don't try to add any additives to my accent or anything. I don't have an accent, I just kind of talk from my brain, whatever I'm thinking that's what I say. That kind of gets me in trouble sometimes." (45, Black Female)

> "Uh, I have to say, I feel like I don't have—um, I feel like, my, the way I speak matches pretty clearly with a lot of English speakers, personally, at least in the area I'm from." (17, Female, More than one race)

Stereotypical speaker in contrast with participants

Different speech than a stereotypical speaker due to dialect, accent or speech style

Nearly all participants identified a difference between their authentic speech and that of a stereotypical English speaker. This makes sense, as 'standard English' is an idealized dialect and

typically does not match the reality of most actual speakers of English. Many participants attributed this to accent, particularly those with multilingual or first-generation backgrounds, or those who came from regions of the United States outside of those associated with a General American accent. The difference was also attributed to regional language variation or slang.

> "It's probably most authentic when I'm in conversation with people I know well, so like friends or family, because, um, I guess I have a little bit of a New Jersey kind of dialect." (14, White Female)

> "Um, since I live in California, I think my speech is probably slower and more relaxed, and at the end of my um words the intonation like um rises, so I think that's a difference from standard American English." (40, Female, Chose not to specify race)

> "My accent is a little different from a stereotypical speaker, an American speaker at least. Since my parents are immigrants and they have Indian accents, I feel sometimes in some words I automatically have a slight accent or I'd say it the way they'd say those words, and that's where I feel the most different. (18, Asian Female)

> "Oh. I use a lot of profanity, probably. Um, I talk quick and like mumble sometimes so it's not very clear. I'll use slang terms I guess. I'm not white and formally dressed all of the time. [laughs]" (25, Male, More than one race)

Not all participants who considered themselves different from a standard speaker did so to imply their language was less prestigious. Social markers in language and speech are cues conveyed through verbal and nonverbal means that serve to identify individuals to the groups to which they belong (Pitts & Gallois, 2019). Vocabulary choice is an important social marker, and while slang and heavily regionalized dialects may be considered markers that indicate a lower class status, a more complex vocabulary demonstrates an educated upbringing and may indicate a higher class status than the stereotypical American:

> "Compared to like normal English speakers I would consider myself to have a wider vocabulary usually. I can understand more complex words, just from my upbringing and reading, like, classic novels and stuff, like understanding Old English in some scenarios. But, that's my comparison." (19, White Male)

Different from stereotypical speaker due to culture, race or ethnicity

Finally, participants who felt most comfortable speaking with those within their cultural or ethnic in-group tended to find these to be the main reasons their speech contrasted from a stereotypical speaker. Culture, ethnicity and race can be strong extralinguistic social markers that frequently 'other' individuals before they speak. Group-specific dialects, accents and bilingualism tended to compound this feeling of deviation from the standard.

> "Chinese is like my native native language, um, and it is much easier for me to speak in both English and Chinese than it is to speak in just English. Um, easier for me to fill in the blanks—like faster when I don't remember a word, and... that is when my speech is most authentic." (23, Asian Female)

Disability as inauthentic?

A childhood speech impairment was mentioned by one participant as a reason she felt her speech was inauthentic in most contexts, and why she felt she was most authentic speaking with her son. Linguistic variation due to disability is a powerful social marker and cultural ideas of how a competent speaker communicates often work against those who live with speech impairments. In most Western cultures a competent communicator is expected to speak fluently, confidently and articulately, and perceived effectiveness is negatively affected when the speaker deviates from this standard (Krauss & Chiu, 1998). In professional or formal settings, a speaker who has dealt with a speech impairment in the past may feel the need to overcompensate to convey competence.

> "Um, I had a speech impediment, I had a little bit of a lisp when I was younger, so I went to speech therapy, and now I know that I do have a tendency to over-enunciate some letters. And I don't know if that's habit, or if that's compensation for the speech impediment… For some reason in my mind, the over-enunciation makes me sound like I know what I'm talking about and it gives me a little bit more authority, conviction and credibility." (04, White Female)

Q.3. "What about your friends and family? Do they sound like stereotypical speakers of English? Why or why not?"

This final question was designed to further reveal sociolinguistic attitudes, as well as potentially meaningful variation in their current and historical linguistic environments. Many participants felt their family and friends did not sound like stereotypical speakers of English, and the reasons for this belief tended to be the same reasons they themselves felt they deviated from the norm: regional, cultural and ethnic differences in speech patterns, accents and dialects. In their response to this question however, participants gave more depth and context to their previous answers, including family history, personal experiences and their attitudes toward the language of themselves and those around them.

First generation and bilingual English speakers

Nearly all first generation and bilingual participants made reference to a different language or dialectal upbringing having an effect on the speech of their family members, particularly parents. Many first generation American and bilingual English speakers had made reference to how growing up with their unique identities impacted their own English in previous questions; their

responses to this question provided further context on how their environments shaped the English of their families, themselves and their communities.

> "My parents and my close family friends and friends of my parents do not [sound like stereotypical English speakers]. Um, a lot of my friends have parents who are immigrants so they have a variety of different accents and my parents have Indian accents, um, as well as my family and other close family friends have accents from different countries." (18, Asian Female)

> "Okay, so I'll go back to the second question, which is to say that I'm the daughter of immigrants, so I don't have like the idioms, I think, that a lot—like, my partner, he's like a, he's like a multigenerational Chinese-American, so he has like this mastery of American idioms that I don't… My parents also do not sound like stereotypical English speakers. My mother has a Hong-Konger, Cantonese and Southern U.S. accent, so it sounds like, like, sometimes she'll say *[in an imitation of her mother]* "What am I going to do?", but it's like this weird thing 'cause she's like a little Chinese lady… my dad, he speaks 5 languages, and English is probably his fifth. So um, he just sounds like—I don't know, he just doesn't sound stereotypical. [laughs]" (21, Asian Female)

Regional & dialectal accent discrimination

Participant 21 had a mother who spoke not only with an accent due to learning English as a second language, but from her upbringing in the South. Just like the previous question, several American-born participants spoke of how regional accents made them, their family and friends different from a stereotypical speaker. Participants from the East Coast in particular made note of how different the accents in their community were from the English standard, which falls in line with the cultural linguistic stereotype of New Yorkers as aggressive and

> "Some of my dad's family is from New Jersey, and they have, like, a very strong regional accent from New Jersey, and since I'm from the Midwest I hear that really strongly… My dad especially… when he's been talking to his family in New Jersey, because he lived in Milwaukee for a long time, and then he starts talking to his brother, or even like a random person from New Jersey, and all of a sudden you're like, 'Whoa, okay, you sound like you're from New Jersey a little more now.'... I have some relatives from Chicago who sound like they're from Chicago to my ears, though I'm not from Chicago, especially some of my mom's cousins." (08, White Female)

> "Um, well my family is like they're, my parents are immigrants, so I mean, they have accents. And my friends, they have their own— they have like heavy New York accents, my friends, so." (49, Asian Male)

What one expects an English speaker to sound like has been shown to have an effect on one's perception of those who do not meet this expectation. This phenomena, termed 'linguistic profiling' by sociolinguist John Baugh, can lead to discrimination and have deleterious effects on

the potential to attain employment, housing, and social advantages for those who speak outside of the expected realm of an English speaker (Baugh, 2003; Baugh, 2017). A large number of participants described how these nonstandard English accents and dialects spoken in their communities sometimes lead to a certain pressure to conform to 'stereotypical' English to avoid linguistic profiling:

> "My mom, who sounds like a five foot trucker from Queens—and she's very lovely, and she's not a trucker, she's a nurse practitioner—but she's got a very heavy New York accent. And, y'know, on the other coast where I went to school, where I grew up, that's fine. I live in Naples which is very Midwestern, goes straight, I guess, straight up 75, so the New York accent sticks out like a sore thumb here. And I think I pretty much tried to lose my accent on purpose. Because I felt like… it was more accepted to not have an accent. If that makes any sense." (04, White Female)

> "So my family, we worked really hard, because we have Asian faces, we worked really hard to have more than American accents, I don't know if that makes sense, but, just because we get bothered all the time. Y'know, I have, I have an English degree and I taught English for a while and, uh, I'm a linguist, and yet—that's probably my dominant language, I would consider myself a monolingual but I still get complimented on my English, and so because of that, um, just walking around- cause I'm in Idaho, right, and it's kind of—y'know, I got used to it, but, like, um, just, y'know walking around I'd like—you don't make eye contact, because people don't make eye contact with you either, um, I think just being a person of color you just get that. Um, but I make sure to speak really clearly, but then also a little bit, like, more Idaho-an or Californian or whatever regional, just to make sure, like, y'know, I'll say 'y'all' and try to—y'know, like, 'folks', and kind of be more casual so people don't, like, give me the cold shoulder, I guess. 'Cause I grew up here, and my folks did that too. Sorry to go on, but that's it in a nutshell. I have a lot of thoughts [laughs]." (02, Asian Female)

> "So like my family's from Red Cliff, Wisconsin. It's like a small reservation, so we pretty much—I'm trying to think of an example. Like my grandma will use—it's like when we talk we'll say 'you'se', and I know a lot of stereotypical English speakers hate that, or like think it doesn't sound like correct. Or we'll say, like when we're telling stories and stuff we'll say like, 'And I say to her', we'll use like present tense. And people kind of like—I don't know, I'll get comments about it, if I like say it in a different setting, I guess." (32, Black Female)

> "So, okay, so, I am from Michigan, I have like a traditional, Northern city shifted accent. And, I unintentionally avoid it when I'm in academic settings, I think because I—I mean, I don't do it on purpose, but I think I'm trying to avoid people hearing me as 'cute'." (05, White Female)

> "I live in Naples which is very Midwestern, goes straight, I guess, straight up 75, so the New York accent sticks out like a sore thumb here. And I think I pretty much tried to lose my accent on purpose. Because I felt like… it was more accepted to not have an accent. If that makes any sense." (04, White Female)

Slang

Slang is frequently used as a social marker for those inside a group who share ideas and attitudes as a way of distinguishing themselves from others (Krauss & Chiu, 1998). A few participants listed extensive use of slang by family and friends as being in contrast with a stereotypical English speaker, who is characterized as speaking 'proper English'.

> "I don't think they do, because like I said, we talk with more slang than we do like, 'proper English' [finger quotes]." (37, Female, More than one race)

> "...When thinking of stereotypical I imagine somebody talking like a news anchor, or somebody on TV, and I don't think that my family uh talks that way. Uh, it's, it's less formal, less put together…" (22, White Male)

Slang is commonly used as a social marker for group identity in adolescence, which is why a lot of slang grows old rather quickly. The internet age and social media has made slang and niche terminology even more prevalent among young people. Linguist Connie Eble contends that internet slang is now "the world-wide vocabulary of choice for young people (who compose the majority of inhabitants of the earth) and reflects their tastes in music, art, clothing and leisure time pursuit" (2009). One participant explained how modern slang affected the way her younger sister communicated:

> "I guess did not realize this until this question, but I might think about a stereotypical English speaker in terms of age bracket, and so I think my younger sister speaks, um, very, very much like a stereotypical American speaker—somebody who is like 18 to 22 with a, a lot of acronyms and um, parts of speech that are very like, extremely online." (23, Asian Female)

Although some slang does achieve elevated status and enter into the generally accepted lexicon of a standard English speaker, most slang is considered niche or in poor taste and reserved for use by young people, people within certain subcultures, and those in lower socioeconomic classes. Participant 25 was a biracial young man who described how the speech of the Filipino side of his family differed not only from a stereotypical English speaker but from the politically conservative white side of his family.

> "Um… I think [that my family sounds like stereotypical English speakers] more so than me. It's actually weird, my mom is white and my dad is from the Philippines and when I'm with the Pinoys it's a lot of just shooting the shit and like, way less formal. But I feel like sometimes I have to tiptoe—especially 'cause a lot of my mom's side is like conservative, so I feel like I have to tiptoe a lot, um, when I'm with them. Um, yeah I feel like I'm definitely the furthest from what my stereotypical English speaker was of the people that I know." (25, Male, More than one race)

AAVE

African-American English is an example of a dialect stigmatized as nonstandard and viewed negatively by speakers of standard or high prestige English. As such, much of the grammar and vocabulary of African-American vernacular is viewed as low prestige or slang, which a few Black participants felt set the English of their family and friends apart from the standard.

> "My friends and family I guess, by my definition of a stereotypical English speaker, no because we typically use more slang and words that aren't considered 'proper' [finger quotes] or in some cases really part of the English language. Like, words like ain't, like people say that's not a word but it's something that we use all the time." (43, Black Male)

> "Obviously everybody incorporates some sort of slang...I guess it all depends on your culture and your community. 'Cause y'know how there's, like, African-American vernacular, and sometimes I use some of that in my speech. So yeah." (34, Black Female)

One participant spoke of her family's experience with linguistic profiling, and how this shaped her own upbringing and speech style:

> "Of English. Okay yes, they sound like stereotypical speakers of English. And um, I guess it's—in their settings, in their professional settings, a lot of my family are educators and things of that nature, so they have to use that stereotypical language in their profession, so we were kind of raised to like make sure you're speaking the proper grammar, things of that nature, so." (38, Black Female)

This participant also made reference to frequent code-switching in her daily life, from AAVE to a more 'stereotypical' standard English in non-casual settings. The process of linguistic accommodation, or modifying one's speech style toward one's audience, typically helps build rapport and, in the experience of Dr. Baugh, even helped him acquire housing. However, one African-American participant argued that this sort of accommodation was inauthentic:

> "Yes. Um, I've run into people, not necessarily friends, but associates and unfortunately family members that are ashamed of where they come from, and are ashamed of y'know the, y'know, I'm trying to word that correctly, but y'know I guess, urban talk I guess you want to say. So they try to mask themselves completely to be something that they're not, y'know, so. Me personally, I don't agree with that. I'm pretty authentic, you either take it or leave it with me." (45, Black Female)

Notably, this participant also mentioned that her authentic style of speech "got [her] into trouble" in a previous question.

Class and Educational Status

As mentioned previously, slang and nonstandard accents or dialects are social markers that indicate a lower class status and a more complex vocabulary is a marker that indicates higher class status or social prestige. Although the mispronunciation or misuse of words does not fall into the category of a dialect, it is another subtle social marker that is associated with lower socioeconomic status or a lack of education to many (Ash, 2013). One participant mentioned a family member that at times spoke in a way indicative of a lack of higher education:

> "Uh, my … I think of, like, my mom, and my mom to me she doesn't sound like a stereotypical English speaker because, like, she'll say things like 'cal-calator', which has forever embarrassed me, [laughs] like when she calls my teachers and stuff." (32, White Female)

Other participants had family upbringings that were indicative of a higher social class and educational status. Participants 19 and 27 both identified themselves as speakers of high prestige English and were the only two to explicitly mention class in their descriptions of a stereotypical English speaker. These descriptions correspond with their conceptions of the English of their family and friends:

> "A stereotypical English speaker… I would consider [to be a] middle, lower class White American that'd have brown hair… they would speak in slang… kind of like, cut corners with their speech, and things like that." (27, White Male).

> "I have a lot of family whose—they're farmers in central Minnesota, and I would consider them to have more, um, typical characteristics of what I think of, um, like a typical American speaker… And then with my family, um, it's like my dad has a Ph.D and my mom has her Bachelor's, and my mom really likes, um, old classic novels. So I wouldn't consider them classic English speakers, 'cause as I was saying like, a broader vocabulary and talking about politics and stuff like that. And my dad's an aerospace engineer and I don't understand any of the technical terms that he talks about. [laughs] And my sister has kind of the, the same exposure too." (27, White Male)

> "I believe that a stereotypical English speaker would be a white individual that might appear to be upper or middle class." (19, White Male)

Discussion & Conclusion

The participants in this study had a wide range of experiences with language and identity that influenced their perception of what a stereotypical English speaker is and how this idea measured up to the English of themselves and those in their communities. Overwhelmingly, being of a first generation or bilingual background made participants more likely to report themselves as different from a stereotypical English speaker, and their most authentic speech and that of their family and friends was more likely to be when amongst those in the same community. Participants of a racial or ethnic minority were also more likely to report having authentic speech when around those in their communities as opposed to around those in non-familiar settings. These differences were attributed to a multitude of reasons, including family history, geographical location, and choice of slang, dialect and language.

The responses of these participants paint a fuller picture of their linguistic practices and attitudes than demographic data alone. Further speech research involving the participants who contributed to this speech database, including those to be conducted as part of the REI studies, may uncover how intelligible their speech is perceived by listeners and how their individual attitudes toward language may impact their speech perceptibility.

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Appendix 1. Demographics of Participants

#	Gender	Race	Age
2	Female	Asian	38
3	Female	White	22
4	Female	White	38
5	Female	White	32
6	Female	White	50
7	Female	White	21
8	Female	White	32
9	Male	Black or African American	33
10	Male	White	19
11	Female	Asian	19
12	Female	White	22
13	Male	White	19
14	Female	White	20
15	Female	White	38
16	Male	Black or African American	40
17	Female	More than One Race (Hispanic or Latino)	24
18	Female	Asian	22
19	Male	White (Hispanic or Latino)	36
20	Male	White	37
21	Female	Asian	40
22	Male	White	31
23	Female	Asian	24
24	Female	Asian	29
25	Male	More than One Race	23
26	Female	More than One Race	25
27	Male	White	20
28	Female	Black or African American	29
29	Male	Black or African American	24
31	Female	Choose not to reply (Hispanic or Latino)	36

32	Female	White	29
33	Female	More than One Race	21
34	Female	Black or African American	22
35	Female	Asian	24
36	Female	More than One Race	21
37	Female	More than One Race (Hispanic or Latino)	24
38	Female	Black or African American	32
39	Neither Male nor Female	More than One Race (Hispanic or Latino)	34
40	Female	Choose not to reply (Hispanic or Latino)	21
42	Female	Asian	25
43	Male	Black or African American	24
45	Female	Black or African American	38
46	Female	More than One Race (Hispanic or Latino)	19
47	Female	Choose not to reply (Hispanic or Latino)	37
48	Female	White (Hispanic or Latino)	23
49	Male	Asian	20
51	Female	Asian	20